

SEVENTH REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN (RECCA-VII),
ASHGABAT, 15 NOVEMBER 2017

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSIAN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Your Excellency Mr. Sarvar Danish, Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,
Your Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of
Afghanistan,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is indeed an honour for me to address the Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII).

I wish to express sincere thanks to Their Excellencies the Foreign Ministers of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan for inviting me to this important Conference. This is a welcome opportunity for us to continue our association with the RECCA process.

I would also like to express gratitude to the Government of Turkmenistan for extending warm welcome and generous hospitality.

Excellencies,

Afghanistan has benefitted from the dividends of regional economic integration through several multilateral arrangements. One of these initiatives is the mechanism of RECCA initiated in 2005, which is aimed at assisting Afghanistan in its quest for peace, progress and prosperity. Likewise, acceptance of Afghanistan as a member of SAARC in 2007 is another welcome development in this regard. Since then, Afghanistan has made valuable contribution towards the SAARC process.

Excellencies,

During the last SAARC Summit, the leaders expressed their strong determination to deepen regional integration to ensure peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia by intensifying cooperation, inter alia, in trade, investment, finance, energy, security, infrastructure, connectivity and culture.

The SAARC leaders also renewed their commitment to achieve the South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) in a phased manner through Free Trade Area, a Customs Union, a Common Market, and a Common Economic and Monetary Union.

Besides, the leaders directed that free trade in goods and services should be accelerated under SAFTA and through early operationalization of the Agreement on Trade in Services.

Hence, in essence, SAARC provides a good platform to complement the RECCA process for socio-economic development of Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

Improved connectivity is the sine qua non for effective regional cooperation, economic integration and promotion of people-to-people contacts, communications, tourism, etc. It is for these reasons, the SAARC leaders have underscored the importance of linking South Asia with other regions, including Central Asia and beyond, by all modes of connectivity through national, regional and sub-regional measures and necessary arrangements. SAARC Motor Vehicles; Railways; and Air Services agreements are under consideration for improving regional connectivity. It is hoped that these important agreements will be signed during the Nineteenth SAARC Summit. SAARC Ferry Service is another milestone initiative to promote connectivity through sea.

Afghanistan is located at the confluence of South, West and Central Asia, sharing borders with six Asian countries. Given Afghanistan's strategic location, it can play an important role in achieving the objective of connectivity.

Excellencies,

The objectives of SAARC, as enunciated in its Charter, include promotion of welfare of the peoples; acceleration of economic growth, social progress and cultural development; and contribution to mutual trust and understanding. Of course, peace and security in the region is essential for achieving these objectives. Therefore, terrorism, extremism and the menace of drugs have to be eliminated through concerted and coordinated endeavours.

Excellencies,

I am confident that this Conference will prove very useful not only in reviewing the progress made since the inception of the RECCA process but it will also bolster collective efforts in achieving its objectives.

I wish this Conference fruitful outcome.

Thank you.
